

Comparing Human Communication and Animal Communication

By Firas Ismail

Who: College; Adults

Standards to be addressed: CEFR B1/B2



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Student Learning Objectives:

1. Summarize the differences between animal communication and human language.
2. Display meta-linguistic awareness by explaining what constitutes human speech.
3. Voice opinions about textual ideas by using the text and other sources.
4. Skim and scan for details or key ideas.
5. Use critical thinking to make judgments of information.

Pre-Reading: Discuss the questions below with your partner or group.

1. Looking at the picture above, what do you see?
2. What do you think the man and the dog are doing?
3. Do you have a pet or do you know someone who does have a pet?
4. Do you think animals have language?

Watching the video, “Do Animals Have Language?”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1FY5kL_zXU

Vocabulary

Infinite	Separate	Communication	Limited	In other words
Nonverbal	Gesture	Symbolic	Abstract	At first glance

Pre-reading Discussion Questions

1. Would you agree that animals use language to communicate? Why or why not?
2. How do animals communicate?
3. What are some methods of communication animals use that people also use?

Reading Activity: Find the Vocab

While reading the article, highlight any words that are also in the Vocabulary Word List above. Make note of the words surrounding them. Do you think the vocabulary word is a noun, adjective, verb, or other, and why?

Reading Article: How Humans and Animals Communicate

1 What is language? This is a question that not many people stop to think about. We all use language, but can we actually explain what it is in a way that doesn't confuse people?

Additionally, many people might say that humans are not the only living things that use language. The types of communication that animals use is definitely useful and meets some of the same goals as human speech, but it is not truly language. What are these differences in communication that separate humans from animals, and why are they important?

2 First, how are the ways humans and animals communicate similar? One of these ways is through what is called nonverbal communication or, forms of communication that do not require sound. Gestures are one example of this; humans have many of them, and we can see people making many gestures with their hands and arms while talking.

3 Next, what are some things about human language that makes it special? In other words, what differentiates human language from animal language? Though we have a limited number

of words to choose from when we make our sentences, we can combine these words in an unlimited number of ways to make an infinite number of sentences to say almost anything we could ever think of. This is something that animals cannot do. They have a limited number of ways to communicate and are limited in what they can let other animals know. Let's take a dog as an example. What kinds of things is a dog able to communicate? A dog can wag its tail to show that it's happy, whine to show that it wants something, or bark to get attention. At first glance, it seems like the dog has many choices in which it can communicate. Compared to some other kinds of animals, this may be true, but think of all of the things a dog cannot say. It cannot say it wants to go outside for 5 minutes, only that it wants to go outside. This means that without language communicating abstract ideas is not possible, only things that are concrete and routine.

4 To conclude, language allows humans to let other humans know ideas that are simple, complex, and abstract or things that we can't see. This is what separates human communication from forms of animal communication. Language also allows humans to say an infinite number of things, something animals cannot do. In other words, it may very well be true that humans are at the top of animal kingdom because of human language.

Reading Comprehension:

Read the following statements. Put a check (X) next to the 3 statements that express the main ideas of the reading.

- _____ 1. Animals are not able to communicate complex ideas like humans can.
- _____ 2. Animals and humans have communicated with each other for hundreds of years.
- _____ 3. Animals and humans do share some methods of communication.
- _____ 4. Animals are able to communicate complicated ideas both verbally and nonverbally
- _____ 5. Human and animal communication has many differences

Writing Skills: Transitions

Throughout the article, the author makes use of various transitions to start sentences and link them together. Write down some of these transitions and describe the relationship they are making.

(Ex.1) In other words: The author is going to restate the same or similar information using different words.

(Ex. 2) Lastly: This is the last piece of information the author wants to present to the reader.

Reading: Close-Up

Put a check (X) next the best answer to the questions from the options below. Be aware of when you are being asked what something is/isn't or can/can't do.

1. Which of the following is a form of nonverbal communication?
 - a. ☐ Talking
 - b. ☐ Smiling
 - c. ☐ Barking
 - d. ☐ Chatting
2. Based on the reading, what is most likely to be a gesture?
 - a. ☐ Waving your hand
 - b. ☐ Snapping your fingers
 - c. ☐ Clapping your hands
 - d. ☐ All of the above
3. What is one way in which your dog **CANNOT** communicate to you?
 - a. ☐ Wagging its tail
 - b. ☐ Barking
 - c. ☐ Gesturing
 - d. ☐ Whining
4. One key factor of language is its ability to explain things which are abstract.
 - a. ☐ True
 - b. ☐ False
5. Which of the following is abstract.

- a. _____ A noise
- b. _____ A movement
- c. _____ An item
- d. _____ A thought

Vocabulary: Flashcards

Each card has either a vocabulary item or a definition. Match the words with their meanings.

Infinite	limitless or endless; impossible to measure or calculate.
Separate	To divide; cause to move or be apart
Communication	share or exchange information, news, or ideas
Limited	having a limit; restricted; confined
Nonverbal	not using words or speech
Gesture	a movement of part of the body, especially a hand or the head, to express an idea or meaning.
Symbolic	a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract.
Abstract	existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical existence
In other words	expressed in a different way
At first glance	when seen or considered briefly and for the first time.

Grammar (Auxiliaries): Cloze Test

Using the auxiliary words from the wordlist below, complete the Cloze Test.

Wordlist: IS, ARE, DO, DOES, HAVE, HAS. (There may be some choices that require the negative form, e.g. do not, doesn't, isn't, are not, hasn't.)

1 What _____ (1) language? This _____ (2) a question that not many people stop to think about. We all use language, but can we actually explain what it _____ (3) in a way that _____ (4) confuse people? Additionally, many people might say that humans _____ (5) not the only living things that use language. The types of communication that animals use _____ (6) definitely useful and meets some of the same goals as human speech, but it _____ (7) not truly language. What _____ (8) these differences in communication that separate humans from animals, and why _____ (9) they important?

2 First, how _____ (10) the ways humans and animals communicate similar? One of these ways _____ (11) through what _____ (12) called nonverbal communication or, forms of communication that _____ (13) require sound. Gestures _____ (14) one example of this; humans _____ (15) many of them, and we can see people making many gestures with their hands and arms while talking.

3 Next, what _____ (16) some things about human language that makes it special? In other words, what _____ (17) differentiates human language from animal language? Though we _____ (18) a limited number of words to choose from when we make our sentences, we can combine these words in an unlimited number of ways to make an infinite number of sentences to say almost anything we could ever think of. This _____ (19) something that animals cannot do. They _____ (20) a limited number of ways to communicate and _____ (21) limited in what they can let other animals know. Let's take a dog as an example. What kinds of things _____ (22) a dog able to communicate? A dog can wag its tail to show that it _____ (23) happy, whine to show that it wants something, or bark to get attention. At first glance, it seems like the dog _____ (24) many choices in which it can communicate. Compared to some other kinds of animals, this may be true, but think of all of the things a dog cannot say. It cannot say it wants to go outside for 5 minutes, only that it wants to go outside. This means that without language communicating abstract ideas _____ (25) possible, only things that _____ (26) concrete and routine.

4 To conclude, language allows humans to let other humans know ideas that _____ (27) simple, complex, and abstract or things that we can't see. This _____ (28) what separates human communication from forms of animal communication. Language also allows humans to say an

infinite number of things, something animals cannot do. In other words, it may very well be true that humans _____ (28) at the top of animal kingdom because of human language.

Writing Section: Use the New Vocabulary

Write answers to the following questions. Use the underlined words in your answers, then share with a partner. Be prepared to share your answers with the class as well.

1. Most people have had at least some experience with animals, whether it be owning a pet or going to the zoo. In your own experiences, have you noticed any interesting forms of communication that these animals have used? What were they?
2. People are capable of saying an infinite number of things through the use of language. Are there other things that we are able to do infinitely? How about things that are not infinite?
3. People all over the world use gestures when they communicate. Are there any gestures you see being used around that you don't recognize? Are there any gestures you use in your home country that you don't see here?

Speaking: Think and Discuss with a Partner

1. **Summarize:** What are some ways that human speech is different than animal communication?
2. **Apply:** Some animals, like parrots, have been known to mimic¹ human speech that they've heard. Based on the reading, do you think these animals are truly learning language; why or why not?

Unit Assignment: Critical Thinking

What do you think would happen if humans suddenly lost the ability to use human language and could only communicate in the same way as animals? How would your life change? How do you think society would change?

¹ pretend; model; emulate

Unit Assignment (Alternative/Additional): Critical Thinking/Research

1. In three paragraphs, answer the following short question: What is language?
2. Choose an animal below or a different animal (with your instructor's approval) and research how the animal communicates. Prepare a one page report and share with your class.

Ants	Bees	Elephants	Dolphins	Whales
Geese	Cats	Horses	Apes	Other

Sources

Image

Kravchenko, Yuri. (n.d.) *Mature man having conversation with basenji dog sitting at the table.* Adobe Stock. File # 187857513 <https://stock.adobe.com/search/images>

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Video:

Bishop, Michelle. (Sept. 10, 2015) *Do animals have language?* TED-Ed. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1FY5kL_zXU